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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

19 April 1985

Soviet Prospects In Mozambique

Summary

Moscow may be moving to take advantage of Mozambican President Samora Machel's concern with the worsening insurgent threat. The unprecedented recent visit of two Soviet IL-38 reconnaissance aircraft and prospective arms deliveries suggest Moscow is attempting to revitalize its position in Mozambique, which had deteriorated over the past year. While it is unclear whether the Soviets have gained regular IL-38 access in Mozambique, Moscow may have insisted on such access as the price for increased military aid. The Soviets will probably try to bolster Maputo with modest increases in military and possibly economic aid. Should the antigovernment RENAMO insurgency pose a direct threat to the Maputo government itself, however, Moscow may decide to upgrade its commitment substantially. Possible options in this case include increased military advisory support, expanded supply of modern weaponry and the introduction of Cuban combat units. The Soviets, however, are probably aware that the latter two options might provoke a direct South African military reaction.

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State Dept. review completed

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Third World Activities Division, Office of Soviet Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Office of African and Latin American Analysis and Office of Global Issues. Questions and comments are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Third World Activities Division, SOVA [redacted]

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Background

The Soviets and their allies have established a broad range of political, military and economic ties with the FRELIMO government in Mozambique since it gained independence from Portugal in 1975. Military aid has been the cornerstone of the relationship, with the Soviet bloc supplying nearly \$1 billion in equipment--including MIG-21 fighters, MI-24 attack helicopters, and T-54 tanks--and some 800 military advisers to help Maputo deal with a variety of internal and external challenges. The CPSU cultivated extensive party-to-party ties with FRELIMO, and Moscow and Maputo signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1977. Numerous economic accords have been concluded, but [redacted] Moscow's unwillingness to supply the large amount of economic aid sought by Maputo and Maputo's inability to repay Soviet loans reportedly have been a consistent source of friction.

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The failure of Soviet assistance to stem the growth of the anti-government RENAMO insurgency and improve the grim state of Mozambique's economy led President Machel early last year to turn to South Africa and the West for help, apparently without consulting the Soviets. The resulting Nkomati Accord of March 1984 pledged Mozambique to stop supporting anti-South Africa guerrillas in return for Pretoria's cessation of assistance to RENAMO. At the same time Machel sought increased economic aid and some degree of military assistance from the West. Both developments reflected at least a partial loss of confidence in the USSR and its ability to help Maputo in a time of real crisis.

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We believe Machel's dealings with South Africa and the West have not yielded the benefits he anticipated. According to the US Embassy in Maputo, Mozambique's economic situation remains desperate, and, more importantly, the insurgency continues to gain ground in spite of South Africa's suspension of its backing for RENAMO. As a result, Maputo may again be turning to the Soviets and Cubans for additional military and economic aid.

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Soviet Access and Interests in Mozambique

A reinvigorated Soviet-Mozambican relationship could lead to increased air and naval access for the Soviets, such as regular deployments by maritime reconnaissance aircraft and repair facilities for naval vessels. The Soviets presently enjoy access to port facilities for Soviet naval units, fishing vessels and research ships. Naval combatants began visiting Mozambican ports in 1977, and now average three to four visits per year. The Soviet fishing fleet uses a small drydock at Nacala, and Soviet research vessels operating in the area regularly use Mozambique's ports for crew rest and provisioning. In addition, Soviet transport aircraft frequently use Mozambican airfields, and since mid-1983 two Soviet-crewed AN-12 transports have provided logistical support for the Mozambican armed forces.

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Moscow's main short-term interest in Mozambique is stemming the recent decline in bilateral relations that has resulted from Maputo's opening to South Africa and the West. A recovery in Soviet influence in Maputo would facilitate Moscow's pursuit of its longer term goals, which include:

- Ensuring Mozambique's continued dependence on the USSR for military and security support.
- Gaining regular access to air and naval facilities that would extend Soviet ability to monitor Western and South African activity in the region.
- Undermining South African and American diplomatic initiatives with the aim of isolating Pretoria and Washington from black African states.
- Reestablishing Mozambique as a base for the operations of anti-South African guerrilla groups.

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Recent Developments

Recent events suggest that the Soviets are attempting to revitalize their position in Mozambique, apparently through stepped-up military assistance. In early March, President Machel told other African leaders that Maputo is going to receive substantial new shipments of military equipment from the USSR in the near future, according to the US embassy in Lusaka.

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Of particular note, on 15 March two Soviet IL-38 naval reconnaissance aircraft flew for the first time to Mozambique. It is unclear whether the deployment of the IL-38s represents a one-time visit or the beginning of regular Soviet access to Mozambique for naval reconnaissance aircraft. A single visit would signal Machel's dissatisfaction with the Nkomati process and demonstrate his option of expanding military relations with the USSR. Granting one-time access for the IL-38s would also enable Machel to reassure Moscow of his intentions to continue military ties, and might have served as a low-cost quid pro quo for the Soviet arms shipments he expects to receive. Moreover, one-time access could serve Moscow as a justification for future IL-38 deployment requests in Mozambique, and might be used as a precedent in pressing for reconnaissance flight access in the Seychelles or Madagascar.

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Machel may, however, have allowed the Soviets the regular reconnaissance access to Mozambican airfields that they have long sought. He may judge that his opening to South Africa and the West will not bring him relief from the insurgency, and that revitalizing the established military relationship with the USSR will improve his prospects for defeating RENAMO. IL-38 access may have been the price the Soviets demanded for upgraded military support. Moreover, Machel may believe that the IL-38s will help Mozambique uncover RENAMO's sources of outside supply. Regular reconnaissance aircraft flights from Mozambique would enable the Soviets to reconnoiter Western shipping and naval activity in the Mozambique Channel and the Southwest Indian Ocean (see map). Coupled with South Yemen-based IL-38s, the Soviets could monitor shipping along the entire east African littoral.

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Soviet Options in Mozambique

The aircraft deployments and new arms shipments signal, at the very least, a bid by Soviets to forestall further slippage in their position in Mozambique. In our view, they probably see Maputo's frustration over the failure of the Nkomati process to diminish the RENAMO threat as a useful opportunity to lure Machel back from his dealings with South Africa and the West, and reestablish Mozambique as a dependable ally of the USSR.

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The Soviets will probably extend a limited amount of additional arms assistance--at least initially--and count on continuing Mozambican frustration with the Nkomati process to turn Maputo in their direction. From a Soviet standpoint, continued stagnation of the Nkomati process would leave Machel with little alternative to closer relations with the USSR, and could give the Soviets the leverage to press Maputo--which cannot pay for new Soviet aid--for expanded military access.

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Should the insurgency continue to worsen, there is a good chance Moscow may substantially increase support for Mozambique in order to bolster its position there. Indeed, under such circumstances the new Soviet leadership might feel compelled to upgrade its commitment to Maputo in order to forestall a politically embarrassing setback. Ways in which the Soviets might do this include:

- Increasing the presently limited amount of economic aid they give Maputo. However, the Soviets previously refused Maputo's application for CEMA membership and have shown no signs of willingness to provide any Third World ally with the massive amount of assistance that would be needed to help Mozambique's desperate economy.
- Upgrading Soviet and Cuban military advisory support. Some increase in advisers is presumably underway already in support of the recent MI-24 deliveries.
- Pressing Fidel Castro to introduce combat troops in support of counterinsurgency operations. Under present circumstances, we believe that Moscow and Havana will be reluctant to take this step. The Soviets are almost certainly concerned with the possibility of provoking a direct South African military response to the introduction of large amounts of modern military equipment or Cuban troops. Indeed, Pretoria's present concern with internal problems could well make it more likely to take military action against a perceived threat on its border. Moreover, Havana probably is reluctant to commit its forces to another costly counterinsurgency campaign in Southern Africa, and Machel himself is aware of the inability of Cuban forces so far to solve Angola's insurgency problems.

In our view, if the Soviets choose to upgrade their commitment, they will most likely pursue the option of gradually increasing their arms and advisory assistance, especially if this is adequate to gain basing concessions from a hard-pressed President Machel. Soviet military aid at present levels will not, in our judgment, significantly upgrade FRELIMO's ability to combat the insurgency. Increased levels of equipment and advisory support could help somewhat, but probably would not be sufficient to defeat RENAMO in the short term. Such actions would, however, facilitate Soviet pursuit of a longer range strategy in Mozambique, under which they would deepen Mozambican military dependence on the USSR, expand their access to military facilities, further isolate Pretoria from its black African neighbors, discredit Western diplomatic initiatives, and restore Soviet credibility as a reliable ally.

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Should the RENAMO insurgency directly threaten the survival of the Maputo government, Moscow and Havana may have to up the ante significantly. Under such circumstances, the possibility that they would commit Cuban troop formations, and provide larger numbers of advisers and a substantial amounts of modern military equipment would rise significantly.

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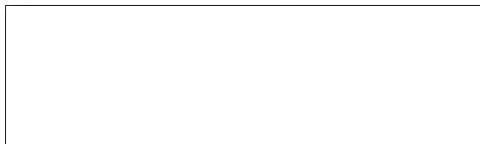
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